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16 October 1965

BRIEFING NOTES
FOR THE DCI

SOUTH VIETNAM

(MAP-SOUTH VIETNAM MILITARY BOUNDARIES)

I. The military picture in South Vietnam now offers more encouragement than at any time in the past few years. It is by no means certain, however, that the tide has turned in favor of the Saigon government.

A. Essentially, the rapid build-up of US ground forces this summer, accompanied by accelerated air activity against the Communists, has stabilized the military situation. The confidence of South Vietnam's armed forces has also been boosted.

B. The Viet Cong, who last spring appeared likely to achieve significant psychological and territorial inroads in their summer monsoon drive, in fact scored only limited gains in the western highlands area. In most of their major operations they suffered heavy casualties; there are also indications of a Viet Cong morale problem.

D-1

TOP SECRET

25X1

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25X1

C. By late summer the initiative largely shifted to South Vietnamese - US hands, as US troops began to move out of their base perimeter areas and to conduct search-and-destroy operations against Viet Cong main force units in their strongholds. A higher rate of harassment against Communist forces is now being sustained and prospects are that this pressure will increase as the US and allied build-up continues and experience is gained.

II. Although it is still too early to gauge the Viet Cong response to this new situation, evidence suggests that they are in a period of reassessment and that they have not so far altered their fundamental strategy.

A. Since late July, there has been a general tendency by the Viet Cong to try to avoid large-scale engagements, in which they are particularly vulnerable to air retaliation.

1. However, the Communists have offered heavy resistance in actions where they have been engaged. Also against opportune targets they have sustained a relatively high rate of larger scale attacks--averaging four or five per month.

D-2

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TOP SECRET

25X1

TOP SECRET

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25X1

2. Moreover, despite some over-all drop in the number of Communist armed attacks since mid-summer, the Viet Cong have maintained a generally high level of guerrilla-type harassment and sabotage; total incidents in the week ending 9 October numbered 701, the highest rate since September 1964.

B. Our best guess is that at present, the Communists are currently making strenuous efforts to replace this summer's losses and continue to expand their own regular army.

1. There is some evidence that they are levying unusual troop demands on irregular guerrilla units to fill out existing Main Force units or build new ones, and that they are attempting to collect and stockpile food and other supplies for a coming winter military campaign.

2. COMUSMACV has recently increased his Order of Battle holdings on Viet Cong regular troops by some 5,500 to 76,100, largely through the confirmation of two additional regiments of North Vietnam's 325th Division, plus four new Viet Cong battalions.

D-3

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TOP SECRET

25X1

TOP SECRET

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25X1

(1) In addition, Viet Cong irregular strength has been upped to 100,000-120,000 from about 90,000.

C. Viet Cong communications patterns also reflect a current reorganization and possible expansion, including an unusual concentration of large units in coastal Binh Dinh Province--site of a large and only partially successful US-Vietnamese operation last week end to trap forces which have been harassing the main coastal highway.

1. The reason for this Viet Cong move into Binh Dinh, where US forces are now present in strength, is unknown, but may be designed to secure supply routes, contain US troops from expanding outward, or apply pressure on the northern coastal areas which will soon experience monsoons.

IV. South Vietnam's forces have profited by the US build-up to continue their own expansion: the regulars now number almost 285,000, and paramilitary forces have increased to a total of 259,000, for a combined armed strength of about 543,700.

A. US strength, meanwhile, currently stands at approximately 140,000, and third-country

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25X1

strength--primarily Australian and Korean--
is roughly 9,500 with another 9,000 Koreans
due shortly.

V. On the political scene, the most marked development appears to be a growing conviction among South Vietnamese that the Viet Cong no longer are likely to emerge victorious in the military field.

A. In turn, this more favorable public attitude has helped Saigon's new military leaders to provide the country a greater degree of governmental stability.

1. Unity among the military, however, is still fragile, and there is little indication that the various political factions in the country are abandoning their traditional fence-sitting and developing genuine enthusiasm for the regime.

2. Moreover, as the threat of military defeat recedes, there are signs of growing public concern over economic problems and over dislocations caused by the increased US presence..

D-5

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